

The Reaping

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Summary: Taylor triggers with a power reminiscent of Glaistig Uaine.

1. Chapter 1

The Reaping - Part 1:

I was gasping for breath as I rounded the corner. I had taken up running after...the incident, had decided to get into shape. Even after two months, even with all the improvement that I had seen in myself, I wasn't able to handle this. I collapsed onto the grass, thankful that I had made it to a park before needing to do so.

This might be the worst torture I had ever endured.

"Come on, Hebert. This is pathetic."

I grimaced at the voice. I had been trying to keep my cool all morning, but there was only so much I could take. "Not all of us have Track experience under our belts, Sophia."

"Even without Track, I'd be able to outrun you." Sophia said. "Hell, I've seen toddlers run better than you. No wonder we were always able to catch you so easy."

I felt my grimace grow, and knew I was baring my teeth. _Come on, Taylor. Don't let her get to you. You're better than this. You have to be.

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>"You gonna get up?" Sophia asked. "Or are you gonna give up...?"<p>

The way she said it, I could pick up the subtext. _Are you gonna give up like you always do?

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>I took a few deep breaths, relishing the feeling of the air in my lungs, and pushed myself to my feet. I took a quick glance at my

watch. 5:37 AM. I rolled my eyes. I used to get up at 6:30 for my runs. I had figured that was early enough.<p>

Sophia had disagreed. My new running partner demanded I get up at 5, and run until 6:30. Apparently it was the same schedule she had kept since she had gotten into running.

I hated her for pushing me into her schedule. Among other things.

I could practically feel her own disdain for me as she spoke. "Bout time. Back to it, Hebert. Don't wanna sit still too long and draw gang attention, do we?"

"No gang members will be up this early." I shot back, starting to move again.

"They could be if they didn't sleep yet."

I groaned, and picked up the pace. It was a valid point. We both knew gang members could easily be up at this time. That they could easily try to take advantage of us.

Just as we knew that would be their mistake. We could take them. Any normal gang member, anyway. Easily, too, with our powers. The only issue would be if one of the Capes involved in a gang showed up.

Even then, I knew that wouldn't be that much of a problem. We could take them.

I could take them, anyway...

"Jesus, listen to you gasp for air. You think you can cut it as a hero when you can't even go for an easy run?" Sophia asked.

"This...isn't an easy...run..." I said between gasps.

"Sure it is." I could hear the joy in her voice. She was loving this. Loved causing me any sort of discomfort.

Even after everything.

We continued in silence. Luckily, one of the few things we agreed on what a hatred for small talk. If neither of us had anything to say, we could let time pass in silence.

For my part, I was able to keep a quick, steady pace until we reached the stretch of this route that I hated the most. One of Sophia's little barbs at me. I knew this had to have played into why she had chosen this route.

I looked the other way as we walked past the cemetery. I didn't need the reminders of my past guilt on my head. I had already suffered enough because of my past decisions.

I would keep suffering, too. Probably forever.

Maybe I deserved it.

"You're picking up speed, now." Sophia said.

I grumbled a response. She knew why I was moving faster. I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of hearing me say it. Not again.

We fell back into silence after her attempt to provoke me failed. I glanced at my watch as we finally made it back into my neighborhood. 6:21. My dad would just be getting up to get into the shower.

And he would hopefully not notice that I was gone. He hadn't like me running in the mornings at all. He had been ecstatic when I told him I was switching to afternoon runs. Which, to be fair, I had.

I just hadn't given up the morning runs when I did.

"Well, you weren't as pathetic today as you have been." Sophia said.

"Gee, thanks. So kind of you to say." I responded. "I still say your regimen is insane."

"Hey, I didn't ask to be here, you know? If I'm stuck with you, then you're gonna quit being so pathetic."

I looked down at the ground, as we approached my back door.

"Right..." I decided not to point out that I hadn't asked for her to be here, either. It was, as far as I could figure, as much her fault as mine...

_Or maybe I'm just trying to lessen my own guilt...

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>I sighed as I stopped in front of my back steps. They squeaked horribly, and would have been a dead giveaway that I was coming in. I had learned quickly when I started my runs. Coming in, my father would come running when he heard them.<p>

For the last couple weeks, though? They hadn't been an issue. Not since I found out exactly how my power worked.

I shifted into the Shadow state and floated up, past the steps and through the door. I moved silently through the kitchen, and then up the stairs and to my room. I phased through the door, and only once I was safely in my room did I return to normal.

I went to my mirror and took in the image there. I saw myself, the same way I had looked after my morning runs for the last couple of weeks. Completely run down and exhausted looking. Behind me...was the ghostly form of Sophia Hess. The same ghostly image I had seen in every mirror I looked into since our last real altercation two weeks ago. She looked as angry as usual.

"So..." she began, looking at me through the mirror. "How much longer you gonna drag your ass before going out and doing the hero thing?"

I sighed. It had been a long two weeks.

2. Chapter 2

-Two Weeks Earlier-

I lifted my backpack and headed out of the classroom. The day had started off...surprisingly well. When I discovered that Emma was out sick, it had felt like a weight off my shoulders.

And then Sophia reminded me why I could never feel safe at school. Apparently, she had decided to make up for Emma's absence and seek me out at any opportunity she could. Most days, I at least got a few breaks. Not today...

And Sophia had decided to be as physical as she ever was. I already had a few visible bruises, and was pretty sure some more were forming.

I had to work to contain myself, keep from losing it completely. It was bad enough when she was just a bully. Knowing she was a cape? That really got to me.

I walked through the hallway toward the rare exit of the school. Very few students used it to leave, since they would need to walk all the way around to get anywhere.

I passed a few other students who were collecting things from their lockers. An act that I had given up since the incident. I knew the school had said that they cleaned it well, but...

I shuddered. There was no way I was going to use that again.

I made it to the rear exit and walked out of the school. There were very few other students out here, as I had predicted. I began walking toward the forest behind the school. I had discovered a little path that cut through the forest one day when Emma and her little gang were waiting for me in front of the school. The path would take me out pretty near a bus stop.

After a few minutes of walking down the path, I felt it. The same sensation I had felt a few times when I was in the hospital, that I had felt during a few excursions with my dad, and that I had felt every day at school since gaining my power.

I turned around and saw Sophia approaching me. I scowled.

"Running through the forest just to avoid me, Hebert?" she asked.

"Following me into the forest just to fuck with me?" I asked.

Sophia shrugged, but her grin gave away that she was really enjoying this. She dropped her bag to the ground and ran toward me. I barely had time to react, but I tried to get out of the way. I still ended up being pushed slightly, falling backwards but not to the ground.

"Why the hell are you doing this? I've never done anything to you!" I said, my anger coming to the surface, a temper that I had inherited from my dad.

"You're pathetic. Always have been, always will be. It's our job to remind you of that."

"You're unbelievable. You...you're supposed to help people."

That gave Sophia pause. Her eyes squinted and she scowled. "What was that?"

"You heard me." I said, walking toward her. "I know you have powers. Wasn't hard to figure out who you were once I figured that out. Only so many capes in this city you could be. And looking for someone who fit your M.O.? That narrowed it down to one, Shadow Stalker."

I knew that was a mistake the second the words left my mouth. I had been dealing with Sophia long enough to know what her response would be. I didn't even have a chance to start working out what to say next when she hit me.

And then I hit the ground.

And then she was on top of me, attacking me more furiously than she had ever before.

"How the fuck did you find out?" she asked between attempts to pummel my face. Luckily I had managed to raise my arms to shield my face after the first few hits.

I began growling as she hit me, and then she started kicking me too. I wanted to end this, to get back at her for everything she had done.

And then I felt it. The same feeling that let me know she was a cape was more...tangible. It was almost as though I could reach out and pull on it. With my mind, at least.

Sophia's attacks were getting harsher, and I felt the tugging happen almost instinctively. Everything slowed down in that instant.

I felt something shift in my mind, and then I noticed Sophia. She had collapsed, stopping mid kick. I looked at her, and saw that her eyes were open, and not closing...that she didn't seem to be breathing.

I approached and checked for her pulse. Nothing.

"Oh shit...oh shit..." My power had done this? It was just a lame power that let me sense capes. It shouldn't be able to...

I stood up fully and turned to run. I wasn't fully paying attention to my surroundings, and found I was about to run right into a tree. I felt something click, and then everything changed.

My body felt light as a feather, and I drifted through the tree. It was...an odd feeling. Looking down, I could see that I was transparent and gaseous.

"This is...Shadow Stalker's power?" I asked myself. I thought on it, and found that I knew how to use it. How to turn it on, how to turn it off, it's weaknesses.

I shifted back to normal, taking another quick glance back to Sophia's body, then started running again, this time paying more attention. I was glad I had taken up running after the locker, since I needed all of the air I could get. I was already on the verge of hyperventilating.

I had just killed someone. One of my classmates. No matter how much of a bitch she was, she didn't deserve that.

Probably.

One of the things that was bothering me the most was that I wasn't feeling quite as horrified as I thought I should. Part of me wanted to chalk that up to all of the torture Sophia had put me through.

Another part just wanted to feel more horrified.

I was on the verge of tears when I finally reached the bus stop. It wasn't helped by what I heard.

"What the hell happened...?"

I glanced around. I was currently the only one at the stop. A bus must have just come. What's more...I recognized the voice.

"Oh great... I'm losing my mind..." I mumbled to myself.

"Hebert?"

I gulped. "It's not really Sophia...it's guilt or something."

"The fuck did you do to me, Hebert?"

"Oh, God. Please stop." _Oh God I've killed someone and I've gone insane.

>

>"Fucking tell me what you did, Hebert!"<p>

"You're not real..."

"Bullshit I'm not real!" Sophia said. "Now tell me what happened."

I groaned, and looked around. Still no one around. Might as well embrace my craziness for now. If it would make her stop...

"I...think I used my power on you." I said.

"You have a power?" Sophia asked. "...Is that how you knew I was a cape?"

"Yeah, it is. I can sense capes."

"And? Clearly that's not it."

"I...think I killed you, and took your power."

A long pause passed in the conversation. "You killed me...? And stole

my power?"

"Unless you're capable of holding your breath for a really long time, and I've always been able to pass through solid objects."

"Well how the fuck did you do that?"

"I don't know. I felt my power kick in, and I kind of...tugged on your power."

"Well untug it and put me back." Sophia yelled.

I thought about it for a second, wondering why I hadn't tried that. Then I shook my head. "I...don't think I can."

"You better try! I swear, Hebert, I'm going to."

"Going to what? You're probably a figment of my imagination, but even if you're not, then you're...what? Just a voice? You can't do anything to me anymore. You fought me, you lost, I won. I was the stronger cape, so shut up and let me think!"

To my surprise, Sophia's voice actually complied, and left me in silence. A few people joined me at the bus stop after a few minutes. Another few minutes passed, and the bus appeared.

I climbed on, and took a seat. I looked into the mirror, and was shocked to see Sophia reflected there, sitting in the seat next to me.

"Oh, you can see me now, huh?" she asked.

I just nodded. This... was new, but didn't necessarily rule out me being nuts. I squinted my eyes slightly. "Okay..." I whispered. "Prove you're real. Prove I'm not crazy. Tell me something only you would know. Something I can verify."

She looked equal parts annoyed and contemplative. "Like what?"

"I don't know..." I said.

"You know I'm a Ward. You know anything about the PRT?"

"Not really."

"Well, the Director of our PRT is Piggot, fat bitch. Bleach blonde."

"I...could still be nuts and just heard about her or saw her somewhere."

"Are you kidding me Hebert? What do you want here?"

I thought for a second. "Emma. What happened. Why did she stop being my friend?"

"Seriously? Still hung up on that?"

I glared at the image of Sophia in the mirror, and watched as she rolled her eyes. "Fine."

She told me a tale of Emma and her dad being attacked by ABB thugs, Shadow Stalker saving them, Emma returning to the scene of attack and finding Sophia there.

Sophia explaining her fucked up philosophy, and Emma making the decision to cut me out of her life. As a friend, anyway.

It was stupid, but it kind of made sense. Comments that Emma had made did sound a lot like what Sophia had just spouted. I would have to check up on all of that, but for the time being, I relented that I may not be completely nuts. This may be another aspect of my power.

We remained in silence for the rest of the trip. Once I got home, I headed right to my room to turn on my computer and look up powers. I needed to see if anyone had a power like this.

Unfortunately, only two came up that came close. The Butcher, leader of a gang called The Teeth. Each time the Butcher was killed, their power, or powers now, moved to whoever killed them, along with their consciousness. So, there was a precedent for capes popping up in others heads, at least.

But the really scary one was the one who's power mine was most like. Another villain, and a really nasty one with a death toll in the hundreds.

Glaistig Uaine, the Faerie Queen. Apparently, any cape she killed, she could summon as a ghost and use them, and their powers, as she saw fit.

I swallowed at that, The two capes with powers closest to mine, and both were villains. Homicidal maniacs.

And I had already killed someone.

I put my head down and groaned.

"You figure out a way to fix me?"

I lifted my head and peaked into the mirror that I had set up on my desk. Sophia was glaring at me. I knew that she knew the answer to her question already.

I set my head back down on my desk and let out a long sigh.

"How can things get worse?"

End
file.